



MINUTES

BOARD OF EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSIONERS

August 16, 2017 at 5:00pm

IndependenceFirst, 540 South 1st Street, Milwaukee, WI 53204

Present:

Commissioner Jeffery Roman, Chair
Commissioner Chez Ordonez, Vice-Chair
Commissioner Tony Snell
Commissioner Mayhoua Moua
Commissioner Sheila Ashley

Sharon Robinson, Dept. of Administration
Jessica Langill, Dept. of Administration
Patricia Ruiz-Cantu, Dept. Of Administration
Rebecca Rabatin, ADA Coordinator
Hakimah Terry, Internet Services Coordinator
Karen Dettmer, DPW Coordination Manager

The meeting was called to order at 5:04 p.m. by Commissioner Ordonez

1. Approval of Minutes from July 19, 2017 Meeting

Held until quorum reached. Commissioner Snell moved to approve the minutes, Commissioner Moua seconded. Minutes approved unanimously.

2. Rapid Response Statements by ERC

Commissioner Ordonez asked how the Commission wanted to handle statements in the future, whether that was an appointed person, a committee, etc. Commissioner Snell thanked Director Robinson for the Charlottesville statement she wrote for the ERC to use. He also suggested that in the future if any of the Commissioners felt compelled to write a statement about an issue that they could do so and then send it out to the other Commissioners for revisions and approval. He also suggested that we should reach out to community organizations to find out their stance on the issue and potentially send out joint statements.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that the Minneapolis Commission on Civil Rights has an operating manual that outlines how they respond to events/issues. He suggested that the Commission look at the Minneapolis operating manual for future direction relating to the handling of complaints.

3. Ordinance Outreach Update/Discussion

Commissioner Ordonez stated that he and Jessica Langill had met with Alderman Rainey and Alderman Murphy that morning to discuss the ordinance rewrite. He stated both meetings went well and that he felt both Alderman would support the passage of the ordinance at the committee meetings.

Commissioner Snell stated that he, Commissioner Ashley and Jessica Langill had recently met with Alderman Hamilton to discuss the ordinance as well. He stated that Alderman Hamilton was excited and looking forward to making the ordinance rewrite a priority and moving it forward.

Jessica Langill stated that the ERC still needed to meet with Alderwoman Coggs, Alderman Borkowski, Alderman Donovan, and Alderman Stamper. Commissioner Ordonez stated that the ERC should reach out again to make contact with these Alders. Commissioner Moua stated that she had personal contacts to some of the listed Alders and that she would make contact to try to schedule a meeting.

Commissioner Snell stated that the ERC needs buy-in from the community partners to help with the passage of the ordinance rewrite.

4. Community & Department Connections

Jessica Langill stated that Director Robinson had wanted to discuss what strategic community and department connections the ERC should be reaching out to in order to increase buy-in for the ordinance rewrite and the work the ERC will be doing in the future. Commissioner Ordonez stated the community listening sessions are a good start and that we need to be reaching out to community members to see how the ordinance can be strengthened in the future. He stated that the ERC is meant to be a connection to the community and can be used to work together with city departments.

Commissioner Snell mentioned the International Human Rights Day celebration that the ERC in partnership with the County's Human Rights Commission will be hosting at city hall on Friday, December 8th. The event will take place throughout the day and include voices from many local community organizations. He stated that the theme is "stand up for someone else's rights." He mentioned we would be giving out awards to individuals and organizations that are doing well to advance equal rights.

Director Robinson stated that the Department of Administration is responsible for staffing the Equal Rights Commission and houses the Commission to allow for partnerships with city departments and community connections. She stated partners are needed to expand the reach of the ERC and to educate the community on their rights.

5. Description of ERC and Commissioner Introductions

Commissioner Ordonez introduced himself and gave some history of the ERC. He stated the ERC is doing everything they can to offer protections and remedies at a local level. The other Commissioners introduced themselves. Commissioner Moua stated that the ordinance rewrite was extremely important because it will allow the ERC to do more than just listen to complaints from the community. Commissioner Snell stated that even if there is an equal rights issue outside the ERC's jurisdiction, that the ERC will use their voice to speak out against those that commit violations.

6. Listening Sessions Welcome (Lee Schultz, IndependenceFirst)

Lee Schultz thanked the Commission for coming and allowing people to participate. He asked the community to give a lot of good input to the Commission and encouraged them to make their comments.

7. Community Listening Session (led by Monica Murphy, Disability Rights Wisconsin)

Monica Murphy stated that the listening session would be focused on title II of the American's with Disabilities Act. She stated the ERC would like to hear about architectural barriers and other city program barriers. Monica Murphy introduced the city's ADA Coordinator, Rebecca Rabatin.

Rebecca Rabatin stated that in her role she is responsible for communicating with city departments about federal regulations and ADA standards. She stated that she also has to educate city departments about the ADA and other disability standards. Ms. Rabatin stated that the city has promised that they would not discriminate against any individual based on disability in any program services/activities. Ms. Rabatin stated that if there is a complaint, she must receive a written description of the issue. She would then respond within 15 days and would let the complainant know what the city would do to remedy the situation. She stated that each department in the city has a designated ADA contact to assist in fielding these complaints.

A community member (Joy) thanked the city for hiring an ADA Coordinator. She brought up curb cuts and the amount of snow that the state of Wisconsin gets each winter. She stated the current city rule is that homeowners need to keep their sidewalks and curb cuts clear. Joy requested that the ERC make an announcement about keeping

curb cuts clear of snow. She stated that wheelchairs cannot get over curb cuts when there is snow covering them.

Commissioner Snell stated that there is a city app that can be used to report where snow has not been removed. The app is called Milwaukee 311 and sends complaints directly to DPW who will respond to the issue within 24 hours.

Joy also brought up that there are many sidewalks that are way too long without a curb cut in the middle. This causes people in wheelchairs to have to go far out of their way to access buildings in the middle of the block.

Director Robinson stated that the Mayor has a management and accountability called AIM. She stated that AIM meets with DPW regularly and that they are working on improving response times and that she will add snow removal to the future agenda.

A community member (Ann) stated that her concern was regarding fire safety. She stated that she is allergic to smoke due to her medications. She stated that her landlords have told her that they are required to allow their tenants to have grills. She stated that when she complains to landlords about fire safety issues she has been evicted. Ann asked what she should do to protect herself from fire safety issues but also not have to worry about being evicted.

Rebecca Rabatin stated she should file a complaint with Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS). She also stated that city ordinance states that a tenant cannot be evicted for retaliation of a complaint.

A community member (Deb) stated she is the chairperson for Milwaukee County's Commission for people with disabilities. She named off several cities (including Wauwatosa, WI) that currently have alternate/accessible bikes to their bike share program. She stated that Wauwatosa uses two bicycle programs (Bublr and Zagster) to offer accessible bikes. Deb stated that there had been multiple attempts to bring accessible bikes to the city of Milwaukee, but that there had been no results. She stated it was originally brought up in July 2015 at a community meeting. In the summer of 2016 the issue was brought up again and they were told that the city was working on it. She asked the ERC to help bring inclusion to the current bike share program. She offered assistance and collaboration with Wauwatosa. Deb stated that Bublr does not currently have accessible bikes but that Zagster does.

Commissioner Ordonez encouraged community members to work through the ERC to make equal rights changes in the city. He stated that any vendor that works with the city of Milwaukee must not be an active discriminator. Director Robinson said she would look into the issue and would work with Jeff Polenske about the issue.

A community member stated that she has lived in the Milwaukee community for her entire life. She echoed the concerns about snow removal and encouraged ERC to work hard to get the accessible bikes for the city of Milwaukee.

A community member (Cindy) stated that she lives in Milwaukee near the border of Glendale. She says there is a van that picks her up in the winter to take her to work. She stated that because of how the snow is plowed there are many times when her van cannot get their ramp down to pick her up easily. She also stated that there is so much snow by her bus stops that she has to climb over piles to get to the bus. She said there is no way a wheelchair would be able to get over the pile to get to the bus. Cindy also asked if the ERC deals with discrimination from landlords. She stated that recently a landlord refused to rent to her friend because she had a disability. She asked how to make a complaint if a landlord is discriminating against someone.

Monica Murphy suggested that anyone experiencing landlord issues should reach out to the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council. They investigate complaints against landlords. Commissioner Snell stated that the ERC would also reach out directly to DPW to discuss the snow removal issues.

Karen Dettmer from DPW stated that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force had submitted a letter outlining snow removal issues. She stated DPW could review the timeline on snow removal expectations but that currently home owners must remove snow within 24 hours after snow stops falling. She stated she would work with Laura Daniels to address snowfall issues. Karen also said that the Department of Neighborhood Services was responsible for enforcing snow removal and that complaints should go through them. 286-CITY goes directly to DNS.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that the ERC is working on developing a system in which people can contact ERC and then be referred out to the correct department to handle the issue. The ERC would also keep an eye on the complaint and make sure it is handled in a timely manner.

A community member (Eugene) brought up the addiction and mental health disability community. He stated that these groups are often forgotten about when discussing equal rights for those with disabilities. He expressed there is a great need for group homes for people with mental health and addiction disabilities. Eugene also brought up the revolving door issue in which people with mental health disabilities are given prescriptions to remedy their mental health issue which in turn creates additional drug addiction issues for these patients. He stated that the state of Wisconsin does not require a dual-certification for social workers/mental health providers. Eugene brought up the MPD and stated that there are not enough resources for mental health intakes. He asked the city to use some of the addiction funding coming in from Governor Walker to also treat those with addictions and mental health disabilities.

Commissioner Ashley stated that the city VA has addressed this issue with their Housing First program. She stated that they provide wrap around services and case management that identifies landlords who are sensitive to mental health and addiction issues associated with homeless vets. Commissioner Ashley stated that the ERC is limited by politics and prioritization of elected officials. She recommended that Eugen talk to Barbara Gilbert at the VA about the Housing First model.

Commissioner Ashley also stated that the ERC will be partnering with community organizations to bring about training sessions for landlords and members of the fire and police departments. Rebecca Rabatin stated that all MPD police officers have gone through a three hour training for dealing with people with disabilities. She stated they would also be going through 40 hours of critical intervention training, but that training the whole police force will take five years to complete. ‘

A community member (Jim) stated he is the president/CEO of Beyond Vision. He stated that Milwaukee’s Department of Transportation has been extremely helpful in assisting with several issues they had with bus systems. Jim stated that the Para Transit system needs improvement. He says it is not dependable or on time. He also stated that there are some drivers who are not trained well to work with people with disabilities.

A community member (Maria) shared that she also has concerns with mental health and addictions. She stated that single mothers are usually overlooked when it comes to city family-centered programs that addresses the needs of women who are having mental health and substance abuse issues. She also stated that there is a big problem with families having to go to multiple locations to meet all of their assistance needs. She expressed the need for a family center for people that are already going through very difficult situations.

A community member (Mike) stated that as a person with a disability he has great difficulty removing snow from his sidewalks. He asked that the city find a way for people with disabilities to get their snow removed. He also echoed the need for the accessible bike program.

A community member (John) stated he lives in Bay View. He said when he visited City Hall a short time ago there were two city vehicles parked in the accessible parking spaces outside City Hall. He also stated that the sidewalk in front of St. Ann’s is terrible and there are many people with disabilities who have to walk along it to get to St. Ann’s. He said that sidewalk has been terrible for many years and that he has made a personal complaint to Alderman Zielinski. He also stated that the bus on Lake Drive and Superior had recently been eliminated which will cause great issues for the elderly people who have to grocery shop. John also stated that on Holt and Burrell there is not a safe crosswalk and without proper lighting that intersection is very dark. He also stated that the Arby’s on Chase and Oklahoma is never properly shoveled. John also

suggested that the city create an ordinance that addresses the quality of carts used by the elderly and people with disabilities so that they do not easily break.

Jeff from the City of Milwaukee asked who decides when to move and relocate accessible parking. He also echoed that he has seen city vehicles parked in accessible parking spaces many times. The parking manager for the city of Milwaukee (Tom) stated that their department has been keeping a close eye on those parking spots and taking care of any city vehicles parked in the spaces. He stated that if anyone sees a vehicle parked there that they should report it directly to him.

Commissioner Ordonez asked if a city of Milwaukee vehicle would be ticketed for parking in an accessible parking space. Tom stated that any vehicle would be ticketed, but that they reach out to the departments to tell them to move the vehicle.

Karen Dettmer stated that the lack of parking spaces is a temporary issue due to the city hall and street renovations. She stated that recently DPW went through an 8 hour training that discussed ADA parking issues during construction times. Karen stated that if any DPW vehicles are parked in those spaces that they can also reach out to her directly.

Commissioner Ordonez reminded community members that if they do not remember who to reach out to that they can contact the ERC or the city ADA Coordinator.

Brian Peters (IndependenceFirst) stated that when his coworker was working with the city of Milwaukee regarding the accessibility of the RiverWalk. He stated that the city has listened to these complaints and worked to fix the issues. Brian echoed issues with parking around City Hall.

Commissioner Snell suggested that community organizations reach out to the state and federal government to get more funding for DPW, neighborhood services and others to provide assistance for all of these issues.

A community member (Mark) echoed Eugene's concern about mental health and addiction disabilities. He stated that a friend of his had died last year from over medication and not given appropriate services. He suggested that psychiatrists and doctors need to be working together when prescribing drugs to their patients. Mark also suggested there be a decrease in financial incentives or kickbacks doctors receive for prescribing pharmaceuticals.

Commissioner Snell brought up the Milwaukee county Opioid Task Force and suggested that they have this discussion with them to work on these issues. Commissioner Ordonez stated he would like to work with them to see what role the ERC can have in this issue (follow-up with the Department of Health, etc.).

A community member brought up the Mental Health Task Force and stated that could be a good resource as well. She also mentioned the certified peer specialists through Department of Health Services.

8. Upcoming Events/Community Dialogue

Commissioner Ordonez thanked everyone for their participation and stated that the city has a lot of work to do to be able to catch up and help everyone. He talked about the disparities in the city and said the ERC would be working toward fixing these issues. He also invited everyone to attend monthly ERC meetings.

Commissioner Snell thanked city departments for attending the meeting and being willing to assist.

9. Next Meeting is Wednesday, September 20th @ 2:30pm

10. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

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